



# Prescribed Fire

## Investigation

### *Prescribed Fire*

Prescribed fire has been an integral part of the National Park Service (NPS) fire management programs since 1968. NPS has conducted over 3,700 prescribed fires since then, and in that time only about 1% of these have turned into wildfire. The Cerro Grande prescribed fire in Bandelier, New Mexico of May 2000 is an example of a prescribed fire that got out of control.

Review some of the findings of the Fire Investigative Team who were authorized to investigate the break-downs in the Burn Plan of the Cerro Grande fire. Based on these findings and on what you know about Burn Plans, give your recommendations of what you think could have been done to prevent the prescribed fire from becoming a wildfire.

### **Coordination**

- There were different prescribed fire complexity rating systems being used by different agencies.
- The State of New Mexico and U.S. Forest Service did not have an agreement with Bandelier National Monument to allow prescribed fire on those properties.
- Bandelier National Monument personnel did not receive or solicit comments from all cooperating agencies in the planning process.
- The Burn Plan was not substantively reviewed before it was approved by the agency Superintendent.

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### Wind and Weather

–Moderate drought existed in northern New Mexico and surrounding regions from fall of 1999 through the spring of 2000 and was expected to continue.

–A spot weather forecast was issued at 12:20 A.M. Prescribed fire ignition was at 7:30 A.M. Weather observations were taken up to 11:00 A.M. No further weather observations were taken until 5:35 P.M.

–At times fire management personnel did not have a current spot weather forecast because the burn boss at the incident had set up no regular schedule for spot forecasts.

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### Backfire and Headfire

–The area for the Burn Plan had wide elevation variations, and varying slope aspects.

–There were five different types of plant fuels, each requiring differing conditions for prescribed burn.

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### Hand Line

–There was no hand line along the boundary of an adjacent landowner (Baca Ranch).

–In the event of a wildfire, contingency resources (extra fire personnel) were not ordered and placed on standby prior to starting the prescribed fire.

–After the fire, contingency resources that were ordered arrived late.

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